

the power of the night

by Norman Kahn



The Sirens show at Treasure Island in Las Vegas offers a rare free nighttime spectacular that helps to draw guests into the resort and casino. Photo courtesy of Utopia Entertainment

In the world of themed entertainment many options exist for creating spectacular guest experiences. These include rides, shows, games, experiential attractions, themed environments, and special events. When creating new attractions and entertainment options for a venue it is always critical to consider the venue, its guests, and its marketing objectives. While each of these types of entertainment options serves its purpose, there is one that can deliver more than just a good experience, or added attendance. It is the "Nighttime Spectacular". Whether it is a fireworks show, an evening parade, or a more elaborate show that includes projections, lasers, and special effects, "The Power of the Night" can be unleashed, increasing guest satisfaction and revenues, by adding this type of entertainment offering.

But before you choose your specific type of nighttime attraction, there are many things that you should consider, that will help guide you in your quest to create this new entertainment element. Two considerations that should be paramount in your thinking are 1) Venue Objectives and Goals and 2) Operational Considerations that will impact your ability to create and operate such an attraction. Once you have assessed these, choosing the specific type of offering becomes clearer.

venue objectives & goals

The addition of a Nighttime Spectacular can deliver amazing results, and while some of these are obvious, some may be not so apparent at the outset of your planning. One of the main reasons to add such an attraction is to "extend" guest length of stay. Creating something that happens at, or near, the end of your operational day gives guests an incentive to stay longer and spend more. Perhaps they will have a dinner that they might not have had otherwise, spend more time shopping in your stores, or maybe even spend the night in your hotel (or one nearby) and come back the next day. All of these are positive results

that accompany the simultaneous increase in guest satisfaction that comes with an exciting new attraction.

ready for results – assess your venue

There are some important questions to consider before creating a Nighttime Show. Does your venue have the capability to support night operations? What is your average attendance during the evening? Can you drive additional attendance? Could your venue support the added attendance even if you were able to drive the "gate" with this new attraction? And most importantly, what opportunities exist for leveraging this added attendance into more than just added gate revenue, but more ancillary revenue in areas such as food, beverage, merchandise, and parking?

A good example of an attraction that was created to increase foot fall and get people interested in making a specific visit to a venue at night is the most recent production of the Pirate show at Treasure Island in Las Vegas, the "Sirens of TI". In renovating the hotel for its 10th anniversary, the team at Treasure Island decided to take what was a spectacular daytime show and turn it into a Nighttime Spectacular. Updating the show with a new story, music, and cast, and taking it from a traditional Pirate Show, to more of a contemporary, music driven, Vegas style show. In doing this they created a signature element for the resort that helps to draw people to come see the show, and then enter the resort for more fun.

season pass packages

Some other venue considerations include whether the venue sells season passes? A Nighttime Spectacular can not only increase length of stay and bring in added night visits to your attraction, but it can also serve as a incredible added benefit (and key reason) for people to purchase or upgrade to a season

pass. In addition, packaging VIP seating, preferred parking, or other items into the deal can help encourage people to return and use the pass when they may not have otherwise... and again, stay longer and spend more.

Universal Studios Japan is a perfect example of how to leverage a Nighttime Spectacular into more season passes and great guest satisfaction relating to purchasing and using them. In addition to all of the other entertainment options at the park, guests can also gain VIP access to an up close and centered seating area that was added to the lagoon where the Night Show "Peter Pan's Neverland" is performed. Since its opening, the Peter Pan Show (which won the THEA award for best Event Spectacular in 2008) has performed nightly at the park. In addition to serving as one of the parks key marketable attractions, it has also served to increase guest length of stay and per cap spending, where thousands of people enjoy the show each evening.

operational considerations

All of this is well and good, but won't really mean much if the venue can't support the type of attraction you are contemplating. Some venues, such as theme parks, have a great deal of support staff to help operate and maintain their attractions. Therefore, the addition of a Night Time Spectacular may prove easier and just result in incremental operational costs using the same facilities and staff to support them. Other venues that might not have this similar level of support may be challenged in adding this type of offering, being limited by resources, staff, or facilities that are needed to operate and maintain such a show.

It is for this reason, that many of the Nighttime Spectaculars we are asked to create are more and more becoming "automated" push button shows, which have no cast, limited crew requirements, and lower nightly operational costs. Utopia Entertainment is currently



producing a Mega Night Show for a major theme park in Asia that will be operated by one person, no cast, no operational crew, and literally will start and operate at the push of a button. This is not always optimal, but in the case of venues that need to manage costs while trying to get all of the benefits that a night show can offer, this is a viable way to do both.

expendables & storage

Other considerations should include the cost of expendables. Many Nighttime shows make a significant use of pyrotechnics, gas, LN2, fog, and other expendables. As a designer or operator you need to be careful to make sure that not only can these costs be managed, but that also storage of these items can be facilitated. This is something that would seem apparent, but on so many shows, it has become an issue after the choice to create the show has been made, and can make for added capital and operational costs. There may also be significant regulatory issues that may need to be dealt with. How many shows of pyrotechnics can the venue safely store, where does it come from, and how many deliveries are required on a weekly basis in order to keep up with the show schedule?

if we build it, will they come ...and where will they stand?

Another important consideration is attendance projections. In creating a Nighttime reason for people to stay longer, or to even just come for the evening, the quantities of guests that might watch a particular evening's performance can be difficult to estimate. It is important to look at historical attendance figures so you can understand what the base-line of current attendance in the evenings is. Then you can layer in the projected incremental attendance, and get a better estimate for what type of viewing areas are needed. Sometimes the number of people wanting to watch a

Nighttime Spectacular can be so large they outstrip the available viewing areas (or at least the good viewing areas). In this case, two performances might be necessary.

One last operational consideration that is important, especially if you are going to operate the attraction on a nightly basis, is maintenance and servicing of the show elements. If your show is dependent on darkness to be run and checked, i.e. outdoor video projection, lasers, large format projections, than this will impact the time available to trouble shoot, repair and maintain these elements, so don't lose sight of the potential impacts this might have on your venues maintenance program.

why not redecorate?

One of the operational benefits of designing a Nighttime Spectacular into an existing venue is the potential duplicate use of existing facilities. At the Warner Bros. Park in Madrid Spain, we produced a Nighttime Spectacular that made use of the daytime Lagoon Stunt Show space. This duplicate use of an existing facility served

to not only offer the guests a reason to stay in the evening to see the Night Show, but also allowed for a complete transformation of the venue, taking what was an outdoor day lagoon stunt show, and through the use of water screens, lasers, intelligent lighting, and large format video projector, created a nighttime venue that was more akin to an outdoor movie theater with special effects. It was a wonderful transformation that added to the venue's appeal while leveraging the capital expense associated with the equipment for both shows. When working on this type of concept take a look around at your existing facilities, and see how they might adapt to a night use. You might be surprised to learn that you can spend more on your show when you use an existing venue that may even have another use during the day. Nothing says that your nighttime attraction has to be in an exclusive venue, and many smart operators have used this approach to deliver spectacular results for less investment.

In conclusion, the potential of a nighttime attraction is significant, and the benefits are many, but in order to be successful many things need to be considered, both big and small. Making smart choices early will help you to create something that not only delivers on increased guest satisfaction and enjoyment, but also leverage another tool to increase revenue, per capita spending, and guest length of stay.

ipm

Norman Kahn is an award winning producer who has spent over two decades designing, producing and operating large scale attractions for theme parks and special venues for clients including Universal Studios, Warner Bros., Paramount Parks, and Six Flags. He is CEO of Utopia Entertainment located in Los Angeles, California.



The Peter Pan Never Land Nighttime Spectacular at Universal Studios Japan draws in huge crowds almost every night. Photo courtesy of Utopia Entertainment
Above: Water, pyro, lights and lasers combine to create a spectacular moment at the Warner Bros. Park in Madrid, Spain. Photo courtesy of Utopia Entertainment.